

Child Fatality Response

Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families

Policy: 100.0165

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When a child who is in the care/custody of the Department, or for whom the Department is providing services dies, an immediate and thorough response is required. As an integral part of this response, the Department will conduct a child fatality review. There may also be a review when a child with previous Departmental involvement dies from abuse and/or neglect.

In the event that a child in the care/custody of the Department dies, an immediate administrative meeting will be scheduled by the Director. Departmental employees to be included, but not limited to, are: the Director, Associate Director, Administrator of Child Protective Services, Chief of Staff, Regional/Assistant Director of the respective division, Unit Administrator, Supervisor, and Primary Service Worker. Additional service providers and/or agency representatives may be involved when appropriate. The purpose of this meeting is to review the incident, gathering all preliminary information available at that time.

When the circumstances require further investigation, a child fatality response team will be appointed, comprised of designated Departmental employees. To ensure stability of the group the members of this team will be permanent in nature and will be selected in accordance with Policy: Complaints/Charges Against Employees of Local 580. The team will be coordinated by the Assistant to the Director.

The purpose of this review is to examine the circumstances surrounding the death and evaluate the implications for future practice. The team will assess the quality of services provided by the Department, evaluating compliance with applicable regulations and policies. The review may require staff interviews for the purpose of obtaining first hand information of critical case events. The employee is entitled to have representation present during this process.

The team will submit a final report to the Director within thirty (30) working days of the team's initial meeting. The Director will conduct a follow-up review within sixty (60) days of receiving the final report to ensure that the recommendations have been addressed and/or implemented.

Support services for Departmental employees will be coordinated through the Department's Staff Development Unit and the Associate Director. These services include Peer Support Groups and a Trauma Response Team. The RI Employee Assistance Program is also available on a self-referral basis.

Related Procedures

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Immediate Departmental Response

Procedure From Policy 100.0165: Child Fatality Response

- A. In all fatalities involving children in the care and/or custody of the Department, the Director or his/her designee must be immediately notified of the incident. In those situations when a Departmental employee first learns of the child's death, he/she will notify the Director. The Administrator of Child Protective Services will make the notification if the incident is reported to the Call Floor during standard working hours. The Administrator On-Call will make the notification when the incident is reported during nights, holidays, or weekends.
- B. The Director will notify the Chief Legal Counsel, Regional/Assistant Director of the respective division, and the Chief of Staff. The Regional/Assistant Director will notify the Primary Service Worker, Supervisor, and Unit Administrator:
 - 1. In the event that a child in the care/custody of the Department dies, an immediate administrative meeting will be scheduled by the Director;
 - 2. As soon as the Administrator, Supervisor, and Worker are notified, the Administrator will ensure that a review of the case record is initiated, developing a chronology of Departmental involvement for the administrative review;
 - 3. All involved staff are required to attend, including but not limited to: the Director, Associate Director, Chief Legal Counsel, Regional/Assistant Director of the respective division, Chief of Staff, Primary Service Worker, Supervisor and Unit Administrator. If a foster family is involved, the Chief of Staff and/or designee of the Licensing Unit will also attend. Additional service providers and/or agency representatives may be involved when appropriate. The child's case record and legal case record will be available for review at this meeting;
 - 4. The purpose of this meeting is to review the incident, gathering all preliminary information available at that time;
 - 5. A preliminary report and press statement will be written within three (3) hours of the meeting:
 - a. The Department will respond to inquiries from the media regarding child deaths, but will not initiate contacts with the media unless otherwise determined by the Director;
 - b. The Director will determine on a case by case basis what employee(s) will be the media spokesperson; and
 - c. All information will be distributed consistent with Policy for Public Information and Relations and Confidentiality.

Child Fatality Response Team

Procedure From Policy 100.0165: Child Fatality Response

- A. When the situation requires further investigation, the child fatality response team will be assigned to examine the circumstances surrounding the death and evaluate the implications for future practice. The team will assess the quality of services provided by the Department, evaluating compliance with applicable regulations and policies:
1. A coordinated and cooperative effort with other departments and agencies such as hospitals, Medical Examiner, Attorney General, and police departments may be required. During the review, the Assistant to the Director will coordinate the assignment of staff responsibilities for interaction with these agencies and for gathering the necessary information. Agenda items include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Current and past involvement with the Department including CPS investigations (if applicable);
 - b. Legal status, court orders;
 - c. Present living arrangement, other children in the placement, adult providers, other adults living in or who frequent the home or facility;
 - d. Medical and behavioral history;
 - e. Review of case record, case plan agreement, worker documentation, client contact;
 - f. Agency's effort for providing identified services;
 - g. Worker's caseload size, supervisory ratio;
 - h. Worker's training records (core curriculum);
 - i. Case records of other service providers if involved with the family;
 - j. Applicable policies and procedures;
 - k. Drug/alcohol use by child, family members (includes foster family);
 - l. Runaway attempts (if applicable) and documented efforts at locating child;
 - m. Strategies for assisting the remaining children, parent(s), foster family, relatives, significant others, and worker(s);
 - n. Review plans, needs, for remaining child(ren) in home or facility;
 - o. Licensing status of substitute care provider;
 - p. Police and coroner reports; and
 - q. Development of an agency position and drafting a statement for the press.
- B. A final report will be submitted to the Director within thirty (30) working days. The final report will include a summary of the findings and recommendations to improve any identified management and/or systems issues that were cited during the review process. In some situations, all the facts may not be available to the team within this timeframe. In these instances the Director may allow an

extension until the necessary information has been attained. Weekly updates will be provided to the Director in all cases:

1. All information gathered during the review is subject to Policy for Public Information and Relations and Confidentiality:
 - a. The Director will determine on a case by case basis what information will be available to the media; and
 - b. The Director will determine on a case by case basis what employee(s) will be the media spokesperson.
2. The Director will conduct a follow-up review within sixty (60) days of receiving the final report to ensure that the recommendations have been addressed and/or implemented;
3. All staff are required to assist and cooperate with the Child Advocate's Office concerning any review or investigation. This includes staff cooperation in providing the Child Advocate's Office with any and all information known to DCYF staff.

Staff Support/Peer Support

Procedure From Policy 100.0165: Child Fatality Response

- A. Each individual's response to stress is unique. In some instances the worker may not realize the extreme pressure that he/she is under. The Department understands these pressures and promotes a system to assist each staff member who has been affected by the child's death. The following approach has been developed to address and reduce the effect of stress:
1. The Department encourages the establishment of Peer Support Groups. Consisting of trained volunteer staff, the peer support group(s) will meet on a regular schedule and are accessible to any staff who desire them. The purpose of these groups is to provide an ongoing resource for workers to address, prevent and/or cope with stress related issues. The Department will provide the administrative support necessary to accomplish this objective;
 2. A Trauma Response Team (TRT) has been established. This team is comprised of Departmental and RI Employee Assistance (RIEAP) staff trained in stress management. The purpose is to meet with staff and/or whole units following a traumatic event as both a debriefing process and to offer practical advice on stress management. The Unit Administrator and/or Supervisor will arrange for the coordination of the TRT in the event of a traumatic event; and
 3. RIEAP is also available to assist employees on a self-referral basis.